

The USDA Secretary's Women Employees Diversity Advisory Council

**Accomplishments Report for the Period
October 2001 –September 2002**

Membership

Co-Chair – Mary Waters, Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations
Co-Chair – Dr. Alma C. Hobbs, Deputy Administrator for Economic and Community Systems, CSREES
Program Manager – Susan A. Notar, Office of Human Resources Management
Dr. Constance Bails – Agricultural Marketing Service
Beverly Broady – Food Safety Inspection Service
Pamela Carter – Office of Operations
Guanda Veney Fitch – Forest Service
Joyce Halasz – Rural Development
Cheryl Hicks – Food Safety Inspection Service
Holiday Jones – Farm Services Administration
Polly Lamberth – Rural Development (Alternate)
Cathy Lueck – Food and Nutrition Service
Linda McDougale – Forest Service
Delila Parham – Food Safety Inspection Service
Linda Simpson – National Agricultural Statistics Service
Mary Thomas – Natural Resource Conservation Service

Advisory Members

Linda Epstein – Coalition of Minority Employees
Patricia Jackman – Federally Employed Women
Karen Kaufman – Federally Employed Women
Jean Parker – Office of Civil Rights
Pamela Steed – President, Association for Persons with Disabilities in Agriculture
Frances Williams – Federally Employed Women

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Education and Training Forums

- In October 2001 over 400 USDA employees attended our Women's Education and Training Forum—the first of its kind at USDA. Our speakers included Dr. Bill Guillory, Ms. Evelyn White, and Ms. Leslie Milk. They gave excellent presentations on gender and workforce issues, and provided employees with an opportunity to dialogue with mission area heads or their representatives. The concerns that employees raised at the forum helped to structure our strategic plan for the remainder of the fiscal year. We also drafted a report from the forum that is available on our web site.
- We held our second annual Education and Training forum on October 10, 2002. As with the first forum, over 400 USDA employees (and even a number of employees from other Federal agencies who indicated that their agencies did not hold similar programs) attended. The theme for this year's event was "Improving Equity, Access, and Opportunity" at USDA. This year the Secretary was able to join us, and her noteworthy remarks mentioned the work early in her career at the region nine Office of Civil Rights, work that she said, led her to want to go to law school. The Secretary presented our Co-chairs Mary Waters and Dr. Alma Hobbs, with awards to recognize their work leading the Women's Council. Our other speakers included Dr. Julianne Malveaux, economist and regular commentator on PBS, career consultant Muriel Yilmaz, Commissioner of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Leslie Silverman, and Deputy Diversity Program Manager Maria Mercedes Olivieri.

We had the program videotaped and we will place it on our web site so that employees from the field who were unable to attend the event in person may watch it. The videotape will of course be section 508 compliant, so that disabled employees may enjoy it as well.

At the end of this year's program Dr. Hobbs asked employees for immediate feedback on the program. A number of employees stood up in front of 400 audience members and said that the program had helped them to strategize how they would try to advance in their professional

development. Other employees indicated an interest in joining the women's council and working with the council on future programs.

Speaker Series

- We have begun a “Speaker Series” on issues that employees indicated were of interest to them at our first education and training forum in October 2001:
 - In March, as a part of Women's History Month we held a free Myers-Briggs training session to help people learn more about themselves and their co-workers.
 - In May in celebration of Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month we held an author reading and food tasting in conjunction with the Asian American Pacific Islander Advisory Council. Author Elaine Mar's family immigrated to the U.S. from China when she was five, and in her book “Paper Tiger” Elaine describes in vivid terms what it was like to be a poor immigrant to the U.S. and having to overcome socio-economic and linguistic barriers, as well as gender and cultural stereotypes.
 - On July 31st we held a holistic health program with local physician Dr. Rufus Houston. Dr. Houston spoke of the impact of optimum health on career advancement and addressed alternative remedies for common health concerns. He also spoke of the importance of exercise and drinking plenty of water.
 - On August 21st we held a financial awareness seminar that was so well attended there was standing room only. Dian Rowe of the USDA Baltimore County extension spoke on “Ten Mistakes Even Smart Women Make with their Money”. Because this program was so well received, we plan to hold other financial planning seminars in fiscal year 2003.
 - We will put reports from these programs on our website so that employees outside of the Washington metropolitan area can benefit from them as well.

Recommendations to the Secretary

- In 2001 Secretary Veneman asked the Women's Council to examine implementation of a child care tuition assistance program at USDA and to make recommendations to her. We convened a working group chaired by Assistant Secretary Mary Waters to examine the issue. We examine the authorizing legislation that President Bush made permanent last November, as well as OPM regulations, and the way in which other Federal agencies have implemented child care tuition assistance programs. As a result of our research, the subcommittee made recommendations to the full Council that the Women's Council presented to the overall Diversity Council in June 2002. The Diversity Council agreed to forward our recommendations to the Secretary and they are currently making their way through the clearance process. We have recommended to Secretary Veneman that USDA implement a Departmental child care tuition assistance program that would provide a meaningful amount of assistance to "low-income" employees to help them pay for the high costs of quality child care.
- The Council is also examining the problem of non-career ladder positions and we will be making recommendations to the Secretary on ways to resolve this issue.
- The Council will also be recommending to the Secretary that the new Senior Executive Service candidate program have better representation of women and people of color.

Outreach

- In May we co-hosted a Women in Technology breakfast at USDA where women Chief Information Officers from both the Federal government and the private sector compared and contrasted their work experiences and gave advice to women in information technology.
- Our web page went up in June, and on the links page of our site you can obtain information in which employees indicated to us that they are interested. There are links to elder care sites, women's Social Security benefits, child care, child support, domestic violence, financial planning, the women's bureau at the US Department of Labor, women's history, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) annual report to Congress with workforce data for 2001, and the OPM guide to recruiting and retaining women.

- We published an advertisement on USDA in the Women and Diversity Facts Data Book for 2002 published by Business Women's Network to encourage more highly qualified women to work at USDA. This excellent resource will be shared with 60,000 individuals, corporations, and universities. All members of the Diversity Council should have received a copy, if not, please contact your program manager.
- We drafted an advertisement that appeared in the conference program for the Federally Employed Women (FEW) conference July 22-26, in Orlando, Florida. We also hosted the exhibit/recruitment booth at the FEW conference and participated in the "Seat At the Table Discussion" hosted by the Office of Civil Rights.
- September 30 through October 5th a contingent of the Women Employees Advisory Council attended the Women in Agriculture Conference in Madrid, Spain. The conference had an excellent agenda that focuses on gender, sustainable development, food safety, the role of rural women in agriculture, fishing, and forestry, access of rural women to technological investigation and innovations, new information technologies, gender and public policies, agricultural extension, and leadership training. Attendance at the conference helped council members to see the global context of our work, and we made important connections with women leaders from other countries and shared promising practices.